

HERSETH SANDLIN DISCUSSES TRIBAL LAW ENFORCEMENT WITH U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR INDIAN AFFAIRS

Washington, DC {September 25, 2009}- Today, Rep. Herseth Sandlin met with U.S. Department of the Interior Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Larry Echo Hawk and other officials to discuss tribal law enforcement issues. As a member of the Natural Resources Committee and sponsor of the Tribal Law and Order Act, Herseth Sandlin requested this meeting with Assistant Secretary Echo Hawk to discuss the status of this critical legislation as well as funding and increases in officer levels on large land-based reservations in South Dakota, interagency cooperation on issues related to tribal justice and improvements to tribal correctional facilities.

"I appreciate Assistant Secretary Echo Hawk meeting with me today to discuss this issue of critical importance to the nine sovereign tribes I represent in Congress," Rep. Herseth Sandlin said. "Assistant Secretary Echo Hawk has prioritized fostering inter-agency cooperation amongst the Departments of the Interior, Justice, Health and Human Services and Housing and Urban Development to address critical needs in Indian Country, including improvements to tribal justice and I applaud him for his leadership on this issue."

During today's meeting, Rep. Herseth Sandlin and Assistant Secretary Echo Hawk discussed the Tribal Law and Order Act of 2009. Reintroduced by Rep. Herseth Sandlin in this Congress, this legislation would improve coordination between tribal, state and federal law enforcement agencies and increase accountability standards. Senator Byron Dorgan, chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, (D-ND) introduced nearly identical legislation in the Senate. Rep. Herseth Sandlin said, "Drafted with significant input from tribes across the country, this legislation would be a positive step in the right direction in improving public safety in Indian Country."

Rep. Herseth Sandlin also raised the issue of funding and increases in officer levels. A 2006 report demonstrated only 36 percent of Indian Affairs and tribal law enforcement agencies were staffed at the recommended national staffing ratio. Presently, nearly 60 percent of departments are staffed at the 2.6 officers per 100,000-inhabitants level. However, more officers than the suggested national average are needed to patrol the large size of land-based reservations in South Dakota. Issues related to improving inter-agency cooperation to fight crime in Indian Country and the status of tribal correctional facilities were also discussed during today's meeting.

"This administration has demonstrated a renewed commitment to improving public safety on reservations in South Dakota and across the country," Rep. Herseth Sandlin said. "I look forward to continuing to work with Secretary Echo Hawk to better lives and strengthen

communities throughout Indian Country."

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